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December 19, 2011

2012 Charter Revision Committee

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee:

I regret and apologize for being physically unable to attend and participate in your January 5 meeting (long-planned, major oral surgery). The Chairman graciously suggested that I may want to convey my thoughts to you in writing.

As earlier stated, it is my opinion that having been told previously on six separate occasions by the citizens of Austin to not change our council size or election procedure, I do not see either the public demand, any crisis or any change in conditions that would make me conclude that the system we have must be changed now. Hence, I have concluded that given another chance, the citizens of Austin are likely to respond precisely as they have on the six previous occasions. And, when given the final opportunity to vote, I will vote to recommend to the Council that they not try this matter again.

Notwithstanding that, I believe several of the other related actions of the committee are well-thought-out and proper for recommendation to the Council.

Now, with respect to submitting a recommendation to the Council, should it decide to hold another Charter Revision election, I will pass along to you my thoughts gathered from committee discussions, personal discussions and testimony.

My observation is that most don't seem to like at-large elections except for the mayor, and I have serious misgivings about any kind of Super district or hybrid system. So, if we're going to pursue purely geographical representation AND clear DOJ muster, I suggest that the committee needs to recommend a council larger than 6+2+1 or 8+1 in order to meet both the desired numerical minority/majority districts and an adequate geographical distribution. So, we're probably talking about at least a **10+1** recommendation. Now, we must be aware of the disadvantages of such a recommendation. By my estimate it costs Austin taxpayers about \$500,000 per year to support each council member (all direct and indirect costs). So, it now costs us about \$3,500,000 per year to support our current council. The above recommendation would cost taxpayers around \$5,500,000 per year to support an 11-person council. Does that give Austin citizens better municipal government? I submit that it does not, for the following reasons:

- Political influence is finite. If some subsegment gains political influence, by necessity some other subsegment loses that same amount of political influence.
- The larger any governmental entity becomes, the greater the necessity to make political deals ("horse trades") in order to pass a measure. Right now, in

order to pass a special interest item, a council member must make deals with at least 3 other council members, each of whom ostensibly represents all citizens. However, when a council has 11 members there must be 6 votes for passage, or a council member must make deals with 5 other council members, each of whom now represents a different and distinct constituency. So, as oftentimes happens, the deals necessary to pass an item are collectively significantly less-desirable than the original intended motion is desirable. Does this give the citizens of Austin more effective municipal government? I think we need to look at the performance of other larger cities' governance to determine if that's really in Austin's best interests.

To reiterate and notwithstanding the specific charges from the Council, I believe that our committee serves in the interest of the citizens of Austin, and that we have the obligation to offer recommendations to the Council which are in the best interests of the citizens of Austin.

Respectfully submitted,



Ken Rigbee